Nixon has quiet 62nd birthday

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. (AP) — Former President Richard M. Nixon, described as pleased with the release of three former associates from prison, spent a quiet 62nd birthday Thursday with his wife, Pat, at his oceanside villa here.

No special occasion was made of Nixon's first birthday since leaving the White House following his resignation last August, an aide said. The birthday came about 2½ years after the now-famous break-in at Democratic national headquarters, which ignited months of anguish, culminating in Nixon's resignation.

Nixon, recuperating from surgery for a blood clot in his left leg, received flowers from his four-member staff and Rabbi Baruch Korff, trustee of the President Nixon Justice Fund. The fund was organized to pay Nixon's mounting legal expenses.

Rabbi Korff told a news conference at a hotel here that Nixon was heartened by thousands of letters and wires pouring in from around the world, including some from heads of state.

The rabbi said Nixon told him he was pleased Judge John Sirica had freed from prison three of his former associates, John Dean III, Herbert Kalmbach and Jeb Stuart Magruder.

The rabbi said, "President Nixon told me, 'That is very good to ease the burden of these men. I'm glad.'"

Rabbi Korff said some money from the justice fund, which he said has raised about $95,000 so far, would be used in an effort to recover Nixon's presidential papers and tapes now being held by the government.

Rabbi Korff was asked if Nixon felt any guilt because four of his former top aides were convicted last week in the Watergate cover-up trial.

"President Nixon said, 'I made errors in judgment. I was too yielding. Perhaps at times too compassionate,'" the rabbi said.

He said that although Nixon admits to errors in judgment, "If you look at his presidency as a whole, he's in league with the great."

Rabbi Korff, who said he has met freqently with Nixon the past two days, said he purposely avoided talking about the Watergate trial.

"I wanted to spare him the burden," he said. "Once when he started to talk about it I purposely shifted the subject."

He said he found the former president "clear and coherent." He added that Nixon was "more meditative, more reflective. He pauses a little more before speaking."

"He is reflected (sic) spiritually on his birthday after his brush with death," the rabbi said, referring to the point following surgery when Nixon went into shock. "It was not just a brush. He feels that God has prolonged his life a little longer, for which he is most grateful. For those of us who love him, we feel this is a significant birthday."